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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001054

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SUBJECT: LABOR SUSPENDED THE NATIONAL STRIKE

REF: A. CAMPBELL-AF/W E-MAIL 6/11/2004

[1](#)B. ABUJA 1050 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: ADCM CLAUDIA ANYASO FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The National Labour Congress (NLC) strike that began June 9 was "suspended" in the evening of June 11 when the NLC announced that the GON had substantially complied with the demand to reduce fuel prices. The NLC called its strike a success, while some of the opposition felt the strike should have continued. We believe the return to somewhat lower fuel prices will be temporary, as the GON intends to continue slow deregulation of gasoline prices (septel) and has returned to allowing prices to rise again a few months after previous NLC actions. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) On Friday, June 11, the NLC "suspended" the fuel strike, giving the GON seven days to force the marketers who have not already done so to revert to February's fuel prices. Many have. NLC Chairman Adams Oshiomhole claimed the NLC had not been seeking a specific price of 38 Naira per liter (about 28 cents), but had instead sought a return to pre-May gasoline price of 40-42 Naira/liter. He warned, however, that the NLC would resume the strike in seven days if prices did not stay low or if the marketers refused to sell.

[1](#)3. (SBU) After the suspension poloffs observed all sorts of gasoline regimes. Some gasoline stations were selling at the pre-strike price of 50-55, some at 42-43, and many were closed. Those that were open had lines several blocks long, and black marketers were out in force selling from plastic bottles at even higher prices. GON inspectors shut down many pumps where they said gasoline was being sold above 42-43 Naira/liter. Oshiomhole acknowledged that some areas "are yet to enjoy the benefit of the judicial verdict."

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THE NLC VIEW  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) Bension Ukpah of NLC headquarters in Abuja told us that the impact of the strike was both tangible and non-tangible. According to him, the 3-day nation-wide strike has forced the GON to reduce the prices of petroleum products. "If you visit gas stations today, at least 2 out of 3 stations must have adjusted their prices. This is indeed a victory for NLC and the generality (sic) of Nigerians that supported us." Ukpah said the NLC suspended the strike to allow enough time for GON to effectively enforce the downward price adjustment, and to enable the NLC to determine the GON's seriousness in keeping prices low. "Failure of the government to fulfill its own side of the court's order would force us to roll out our tanks one more time," he emphasized.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Ukpah said the other major victory for the NLC was that both Nigerian people and Government know the NLC is serious and means business. "People now believe we are not the toothless bulldog that can only bark but not bite." He said this was particularly important for the credibility of the NLC after several unsuccessful strike attempts were made in the past.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Ukpah, and other NLC leaders, are still angry over the violence at the NLC building June 10. "It is so absurd that after one of them was confirmed dead, a survivor is now nursing his wounds in a police cell instead of the in the hospital," Ukpah furiously complained, adding that even under military regimes the wounded were normally taken to hospital. He called on all democratic forces to check the excesses of the regime.

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A VIEW FROM THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION  
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[1](#)7. (C) Some wanted the strike to last longer, to "check the excesses of the regime" or otherwise. Poloff spoke with Buba Galadima of the opposition Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP), which had thrown its support behind the strike. Galadima said the CNPP issued a statement expressing its unhappiness with the decision of the NLC leadership to call off the strike. He said the CNPP had never believed

Oshiomhole was capable of carrying out a real battle against the GON, accusing him of "always dancing to the tune of the government." He said Oshiomhole had been forced to go along with the strike in the first place because others in the NLC believed he was becoming too soft on the regime.

18. (C) According to Galadima, Oshiomhole wanted to call off the strike as early as Thursday anyway. Galadima said the strike was suspended in haste before it ever really threatened the GON, but it had sent a message: "Nigerians have now discovered their strength as provided by the Nigerian constitution. We can strike or effect a mass action peacefully despite the intimidations of the regime." (Note: A CNPP "Mass Action" in Abuja in May against the GON fizzled when security forces arrested many of the demonstrators, and kept those remaining on the edge of town and separated from the Mass Action leaders. End Note.) Galadima also contended that the strike would send a strong message to the international community that things were not as rosy in Nigeria as Obasanjo paints them.  
CAMPBELL